Winter 2009

Passenger Voice North West

Independent national rail passenger watchdog

Passengerfocus
putting rail passengers first

Opinion-sounding for new bus role

Passenger Focus is progressing its bus, coach and tram work

Passenger Focus manager David Sidebottom and his colleagues have been laying the groundwork for our new bus passenger representation role by visiting a range of national stakeholder organisations as well as local authorities, Passenger Transport Executives and bus operators. He has sounded out their views on issues affecting passengers and the industry and what Passenger Focus's priorities should be, as well as fact finding about operations, routes and contractual arrangements.

Issues common to all are concessionary fares, punctuality and quality partnerships. Local authorities are looking carefully at the latter, and David has been talking about how Passenger Focus could influence them in the same way as rail passenger franchises. This would also entail a methodology for measuring their effectiveness.

First TransPennine Express station programme rewarded

First TransPennine Express (TPE) has won many awards for its work in improving station facilities for passengers. The Passenger Focus Spring 2008 National Passenger Survey placed TPE as the number one train operating company for overall station environment, reflecting the £12 million investment in stations as part of its franchise commitments. This position was endorsed at two awards evenings, the first of which was the 2008 National Rail Awards where Grange-over-Sands was winner of the Small Station category in Station of the Year. TPE also won at the International Station of the Year awards 2008 in Belfast, at which Windermere was Best Small Station and Manchester Airport was Best Medium-sized Station.

Passenger managers to work for better north west train services

Passenger Focus has found record numbers of people across Great Britain are satisfied with their train journey.

Launching the Autumn National Passenger Survey 2008 in the Winter 2009 Passenger Voice bulletin, the rail watchdog has reported that 83% of passengers are satisfied with their rail journey.

Although passengers rate their overall experience quite high, Passenger Focus has identified several areas where improvements must be made. Passenger Focus managers Kerry Williamson, Julie Warburton and Susan Tibbett will be working with train companies in the north west to make certain passengers' concerns are addressed in 2009.

North West

Train Operating Company (TOC)	Overall % satisfied	Passengers' satisfaction up	Passengers' satisfaction down
East Midlands Trains	81	Connections with other forms of public transport	Availability of staff on the train
First TransPennine Express	83	No significant improvements in satisfaction scores	Train toilet facilities
Merseyrail	90	Cleanliness of the inside of the train	No decline in satisfaction scores
Northern	82	Personal security on the train	Car-parking facilities
Virgin Trains	84	How a request to station staff was handled	Punctuality/reliability

Improving Merseyside rail services

Work has begun on the Network Rail (NR) Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) for Merseyside, with meetings of the Stakeholder Management Group (SMG) in which Passenger Focus is involved. The object of the SMG is to analyse the current network in and around Merseyside, and to identify any issues that need to be addressed in the short, medium and long term (the next 30 years). Several problems are obvious.

First, the capacity of some stations and particularly those underground is inadequate. At times the platforms are so overcrowded that passengers have to be stopped from making their way onto them until there is adequate room. Various options are currently being examined. Overcrowding can be equally bad on trains, especially during peak times on all services into Liverpool.

The SMG has identified that a station at Skelmersdale may help to improve connectivity on the Ormskirk services, although more work needs to be done to look at the cost and value for money of such a scheme.

Passenger Focus undertook research on parts of the Merseyside network asking passengers for their views of the current services and what improvements they would like to see. We will use this evidence in our RUS response. Copies of the RUS consultation document can be found on NR's website **www.networkrail.co.uk**. Responses to the consultation must be submitted by 20 February 2009.

News roundup

• Progress on station car-parks
Virgin Trains' car-park expansions are well underway, with developers on site at Birmingham International, Oxenholme, Preston, Rugby, Runcorn and Stafford, creating additional parking spaces either at ground level by extending the existing car-parks or by building multi-storey car-parks. Preston will have an additional 469 spaces, Birmingham International will have 835, Rugby 269 and Runcorn 198. Carlisle, Coventry, Wigan North Western and Wolverhampton are next in line for work to commence.

Passenger Focus has asked Virgin to include details of local bus services and alternative car-parks on its leaflets, as well as posters about car-park improvements to help passengers to get to and from their local station as easily as possible during building work.

• Facelift for Warrington Bank Quay
Work is in hand to create a new station frontage, booking hall and taxi rank at Warrington Bank Quay. The revamped station frontage will enable taxis to pick up passengers in front of the station exit, and a new bus stop has also been created. There will be short-stay parking bays and disabled parking spaces close to the front entrance. Passenger Focus is now pressing for the subway between platforms to be revamped to make the whole station experience a pleasant one.

• New timetable for Northern
Northern Rail's new timetable was put into action on 14 December. Passenger Focus will be monitoring the timetable changes and their effectiveness over the next few months, and will be working very closely with the industry with regards to future timetable changes.

New 'regional' area on Passenger Focus website

In February Passenger Focus will launch a new section on our website to show the work we are doing on behalf of passengers around the country. The new area of the site will show our work by region and nation, train operating company, route and issues such as getting a seat or fares and ticketing. It will also feature Google Maps™ technology which will allow website users to view any Passenger Focus work with a specific geographic location.

Virgin high-frequency timetable begins

Passenger Focus has criticised New Year problems on the West Coast Main Line (WCML).

Anthony Smith, chief executive for the national rail watchdog Passenger Focus, said: "The upheaval caused by a horrific air accident and overhead line failures within days of each other are a double whammy for WCML passengers. This is not the best start to the new year for passengers and we hope that a normal service will resume as soon as possible – especially since passengers are now paying more to use the train. Furthermore, with the major investment the WCML has undergone, passengers would expect to see a greater resilience and a reduction of infrastructure problems."

Passenger Focus will continue to monitor performance on the WCML and in particular the launch of the Virgin high-frequency service.

All the work on the WCML has been geared towards the new timetable that came into operation on 14 December, which sees three trains an hour each way between Manchester and London, Birmingham and London, and hourly services between Liverpool, Preston and Euston. The six-year upgrade will result in 30 per cent more Virgin train services on the route every day.

However, there is still concern about continuing weekend engineering works to improve line speed and capacity on the northern part of the route between Oxenholme Lake District and Lockerbie on Saturday and Sunday from 31 January to 22 March, meaning yet more disruption for passengers.

Passenger Focus will be keeping a close eye on the new timetable, together with how well Network Rail and Virgin handle alternative services during the line closures.